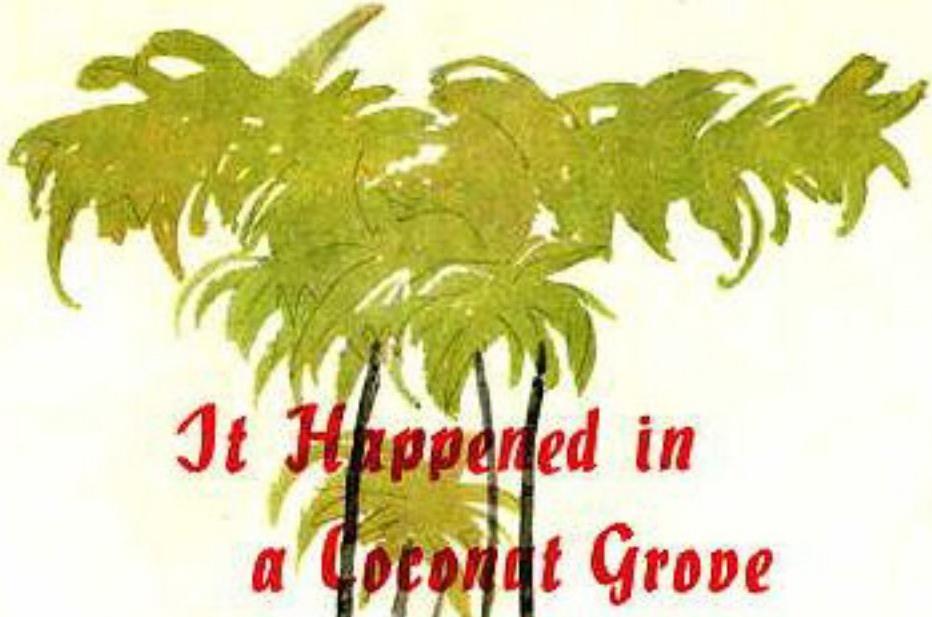




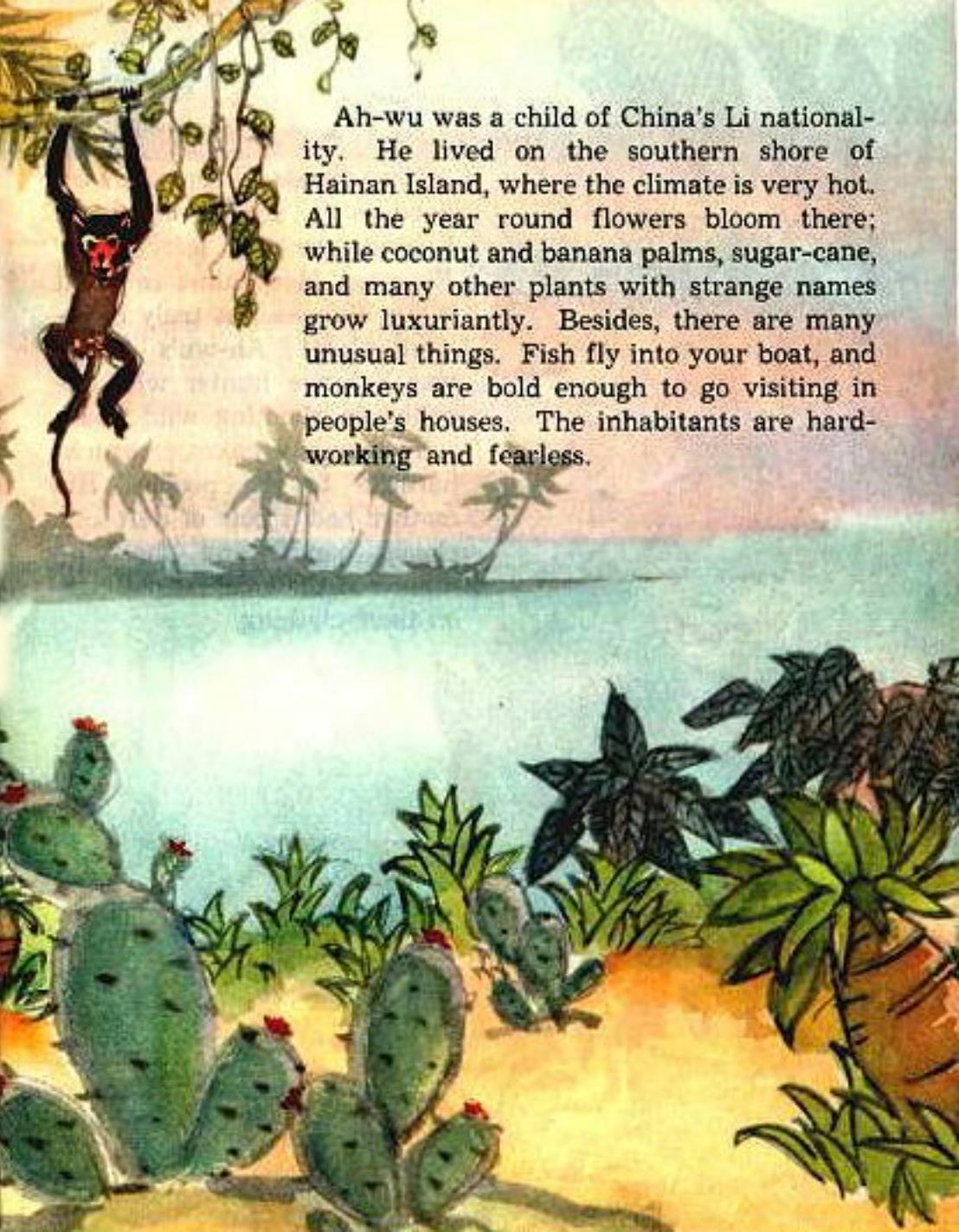
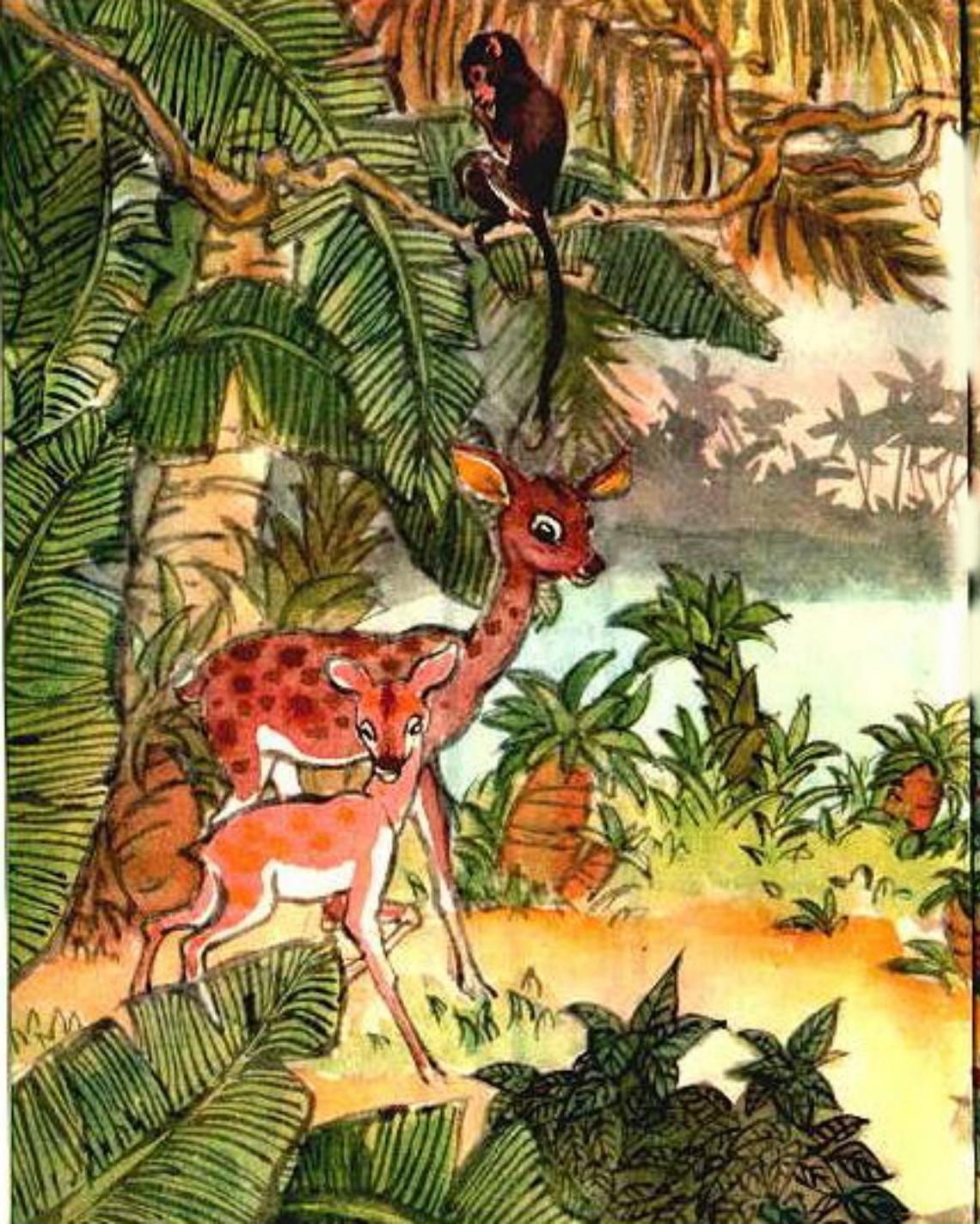
*It Happened in
a Coconut Grove*



It Happened in a Coconut Grove

*Story by Yen Tan
Illustrations by Lee Wan-tsui*





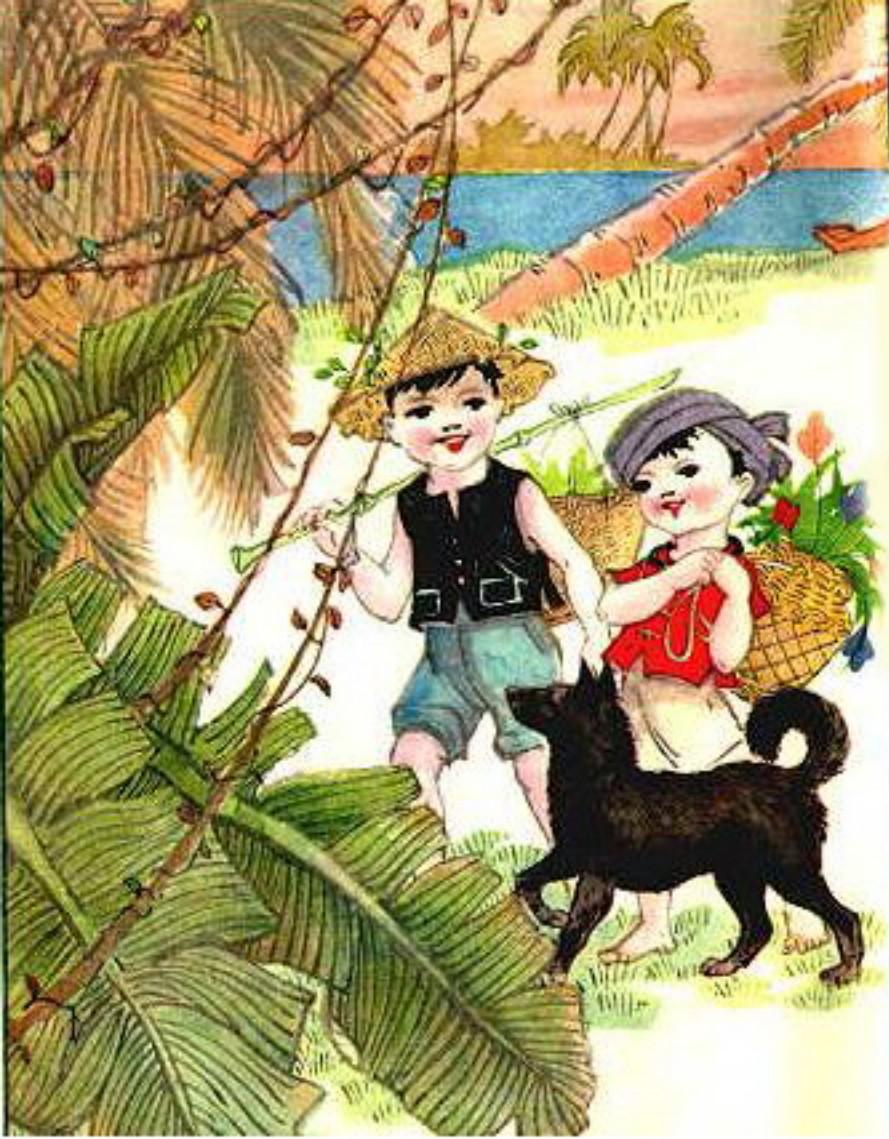
Ah-wu was a child of China's Li nationality. He lived on the southern shore of Hainan Island, where the climate is very hot. All the year round flowers bloom there; while coconut and banana palms, sugar-cane, and many other plants with strange names grow luxuriantly. Besides, there are many unusual things. Fish fly into your boat, and monkeys are bold enough to go visiting in people's houses. The inhabitants are hard-working and fearless.



The house where Ah-wu lived is in a coconut grove. Behind are the lofty Five-Fingered Mountains; in front is the blue sea. A truly beautiful place! Ah-wu's father was a brave hunter who excelled in shooting wild boars and venomous snakes, creatures harmful to the people. His mother had a pair of deft and clever hands, and she embroidered the loveliest patterns on their clothing.



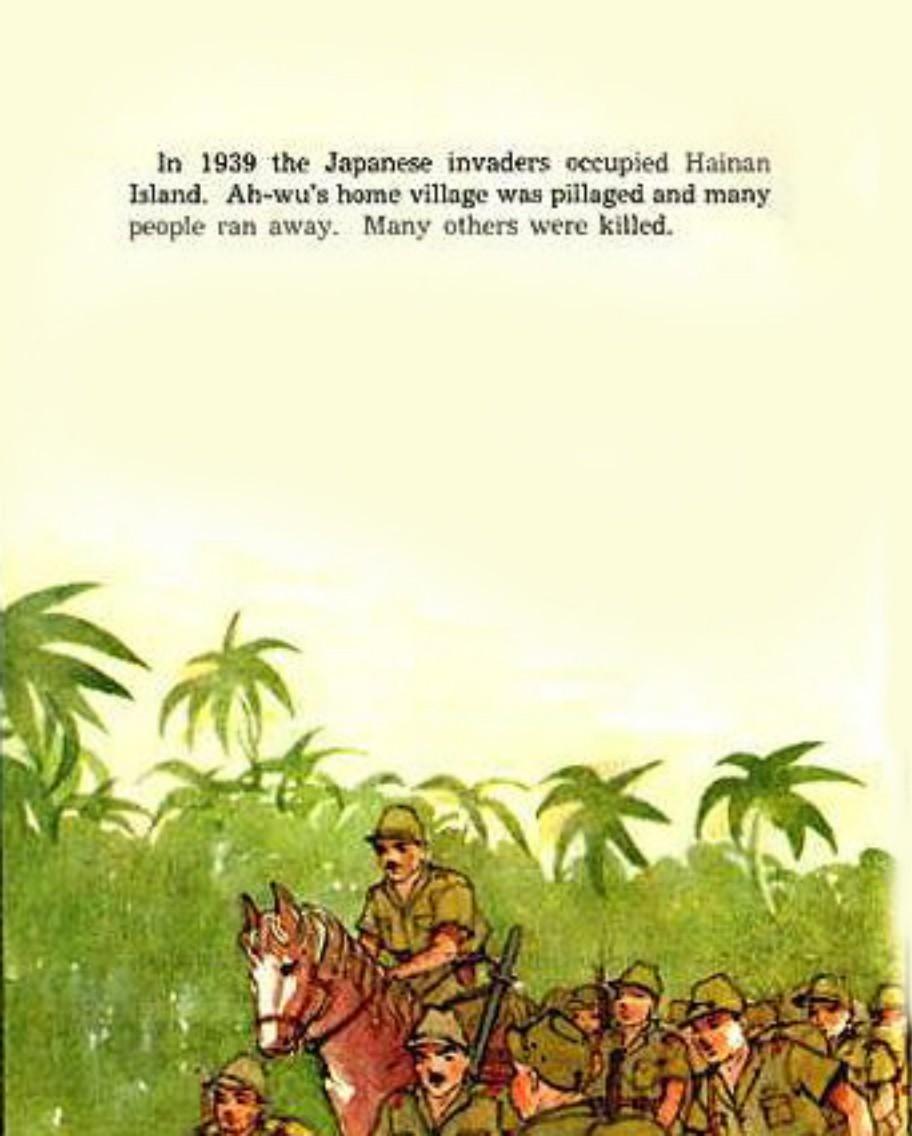
Though Ah-wu was only ten he could climb the tallest coconut tree; he could tell which was a venomous snake and once he even caught a doe that broke into the village. But he had one regret — he had no gun and so he could not as yet be a brave hunter like his father.



Ah-wu had two good friends. One was his neighbour Ah-hsiao, the other, his dog "Blackie".

Ah-hsiao was only seven, very short, and timid. He was afraid of snakes and boars, and sometimes he was even afraid of the monkeys in the trees and he often cried. But Ah-wu loved him; he treated him like his own little brother. Ah-hsiao liked Ah-wu too and looked upon him as an older brother. The two boys had never been known to quarrel.

Blackie was not an ordinary dog either. When he cocked his ears to listen, no sound within miles escaped him; his eyes glowed like burning coals. He could claw a boar limb from limb. But to his little master he was docile and obedient.



In 1939 the Japanese invaders occupied Hainan Island. Ah-wu's home village was pillaged and many people ran away. Many others were killed.

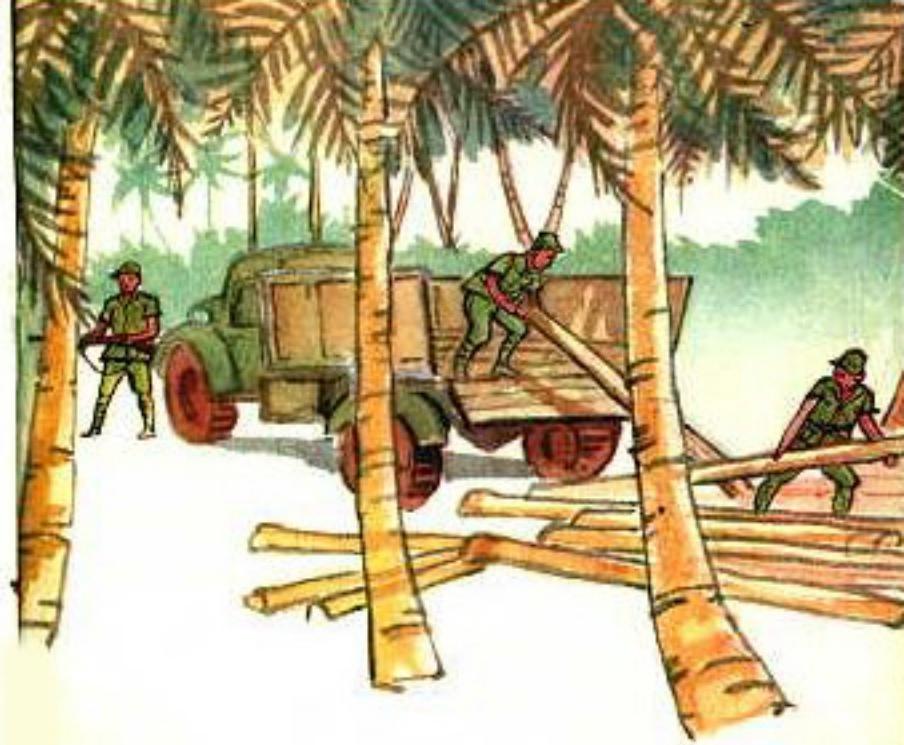


The Japanese soldiers, afraid that the Li people would rise against them, took away all their hunting guns. Unable to hunt, the people's life became very hard. Ah-wu hated the Japanese soldiers.

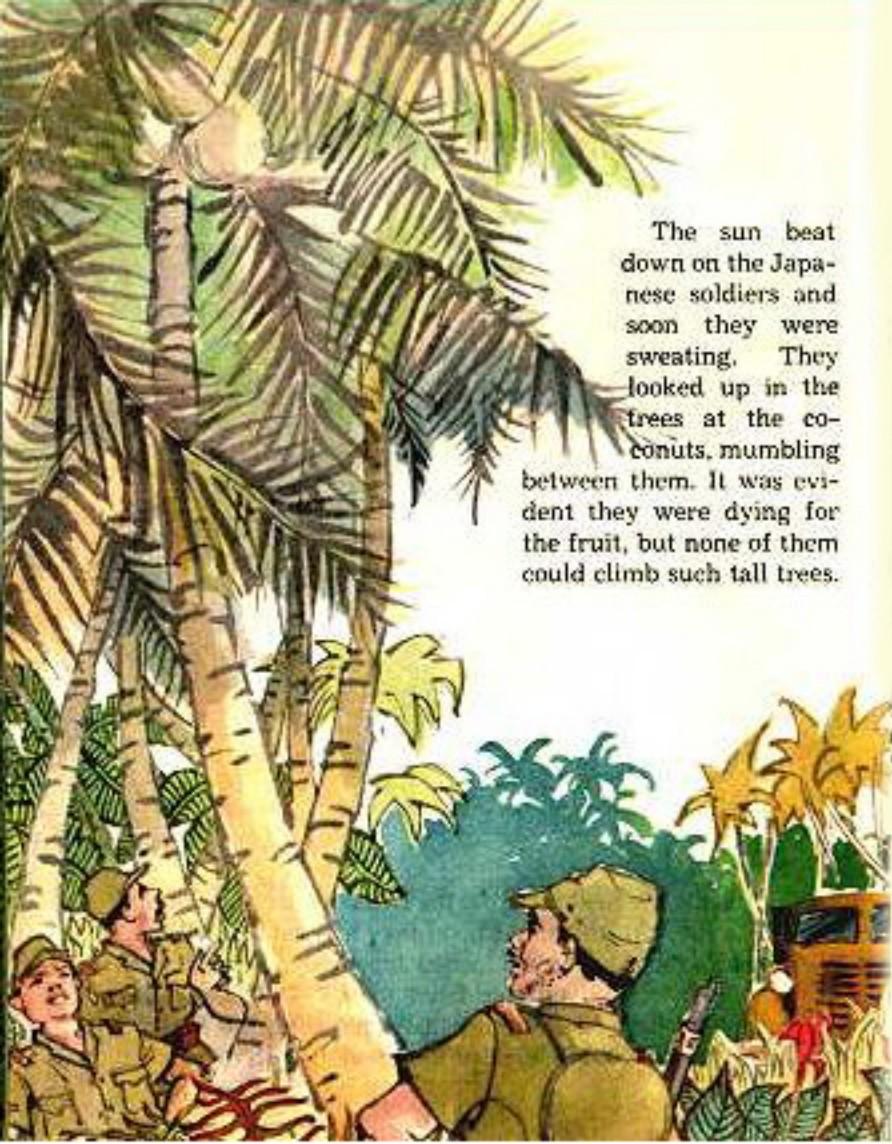


One day the guerrillas came to see Ah-wu and Ah-hsiao and asked them to go down the hill and see what the enemy was up to. The Japanese would never suspect such small boys. . . .

Ah-wu and Ah-hsiao jumped for joy to be given this task. "You can depend on us!" they said.



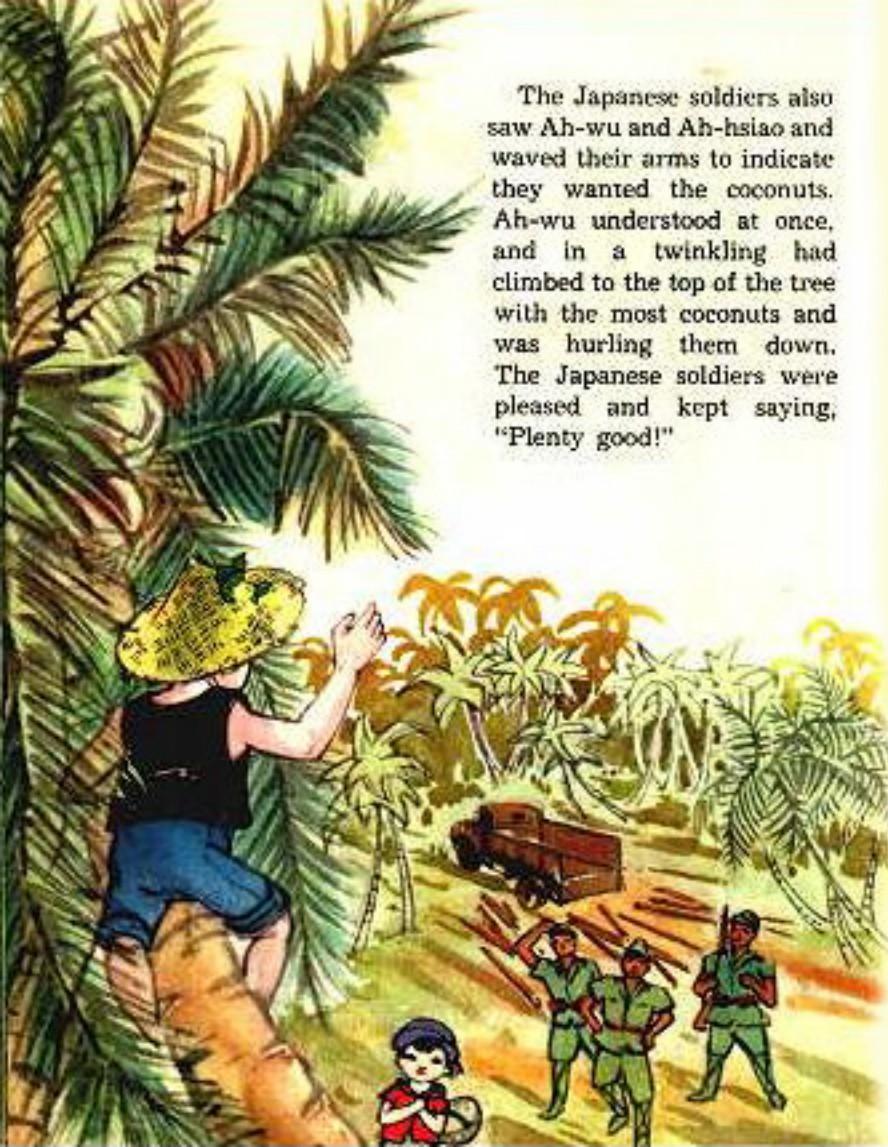
Early the next morning the two boys set out, taking Blackie with them. At noon they arrived at a village near which they saw a loaded Japanese military truck come to a stop not far from them. Two Japanese soldiers jumped off and began unloading the timber in the truck while a third kept watch with a rifle.



The sun beat down on the Japanese soldiers and soon they were sweating. They looked up in the trees at the coconuts, muttering between them. It was evident they were dying for the fruit, but none of them could climb such tall trees.



Ah-wu fixed his eyes on the Japanese, particularly the one with the rifle. How he wanted to rush up, knock him down, and snatch his gun!



The Japanese soldiers also saw Ah-wu and Ah-hsiao and waved their arms to indicate they wanted the coconuts. Ah-wu understood at once, and in a twinkling had climbed to the top of the tree with the most coconuts and was hurling them down. The Japanese soldiers were pleased and kept saying, "Plenty good!"

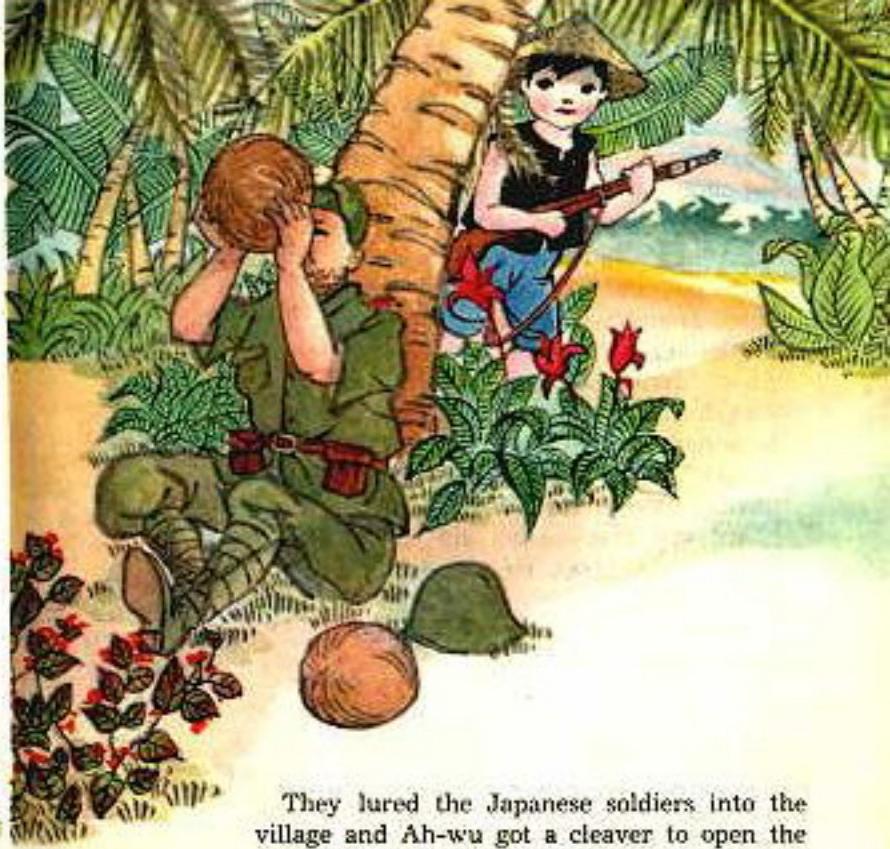


They had the coconuts, but no knife to open them, so they still could not drink the milk. Ah-wu said they could get a knife from the village. Since the village was near and the Japanese soldiers were so thirsty they went along with the boys.

Before going, Ah-wu made a sign to Blackie to cover the Japanese guard.



Ah-hsiao did not understand why Ah-wu wanted to curry favour with the Japanese soldiers, and Ah-wu whispered his plan to him as they walked along.



They lured the Japanese soldiers into the village and Ah-wu got a cleaver to open the coconuts. The two Japanese sat down on the ground and began gulping down the coconut milk. Ah-wu gave Ah-hsiao a high sign to watch the two Japanese soldiers. Then he opened another two coconuts and took them to the guard. When the latter caught sight of the coconuts and put down his gun to take one, Ah-wu quietly took the gun and ran away.

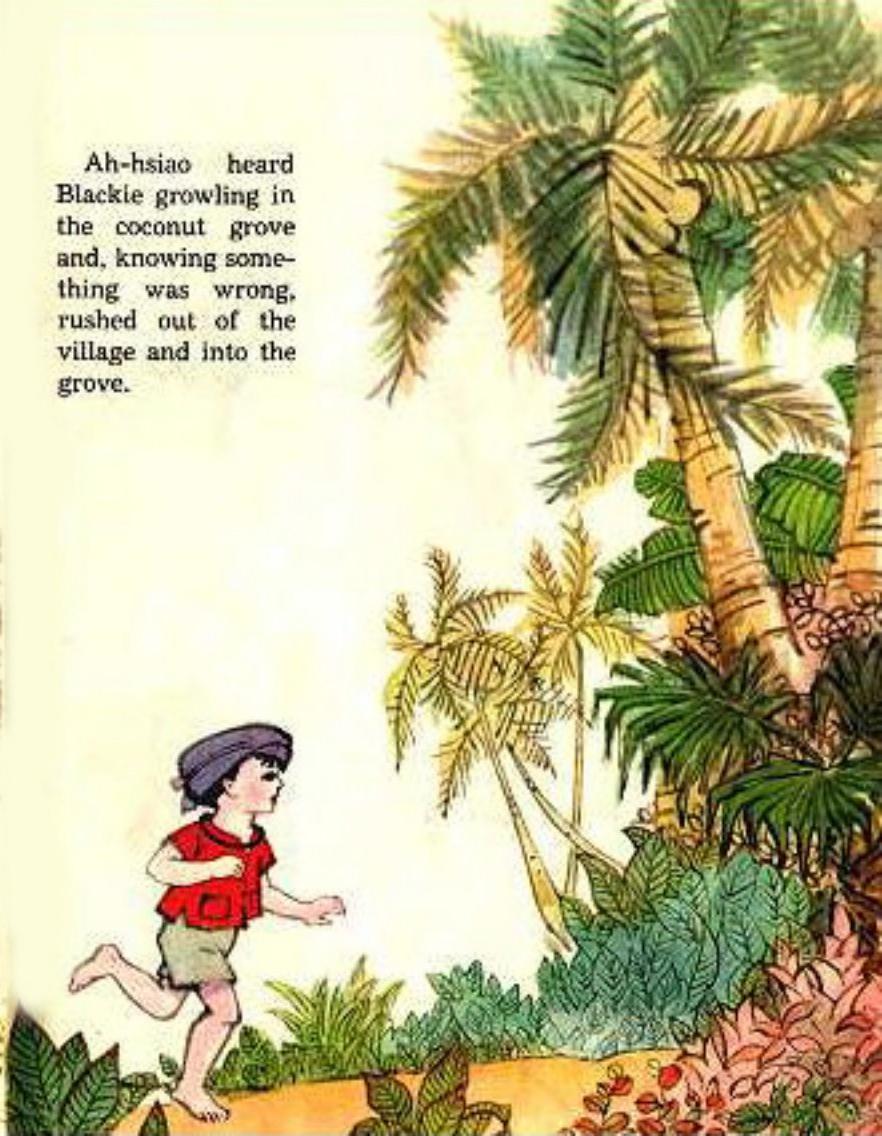
When the guard had finished drinking the coconut milk and looked around for his gun he saw what had happened. Alarmed, he threw down the coconut shell to run after Ah-wu. The rifle was much bigger than the boy, and Ah-wu could not run very fast with it. Afraid of being overtaken, he became excited and pulled the trigger. "Ping", the bullet flew through the trees. When the guard saw that Ah-wu did not know how to shoot, the man ran all the faster.

Meanwhile the brave Blackie chased and barked at the guard.





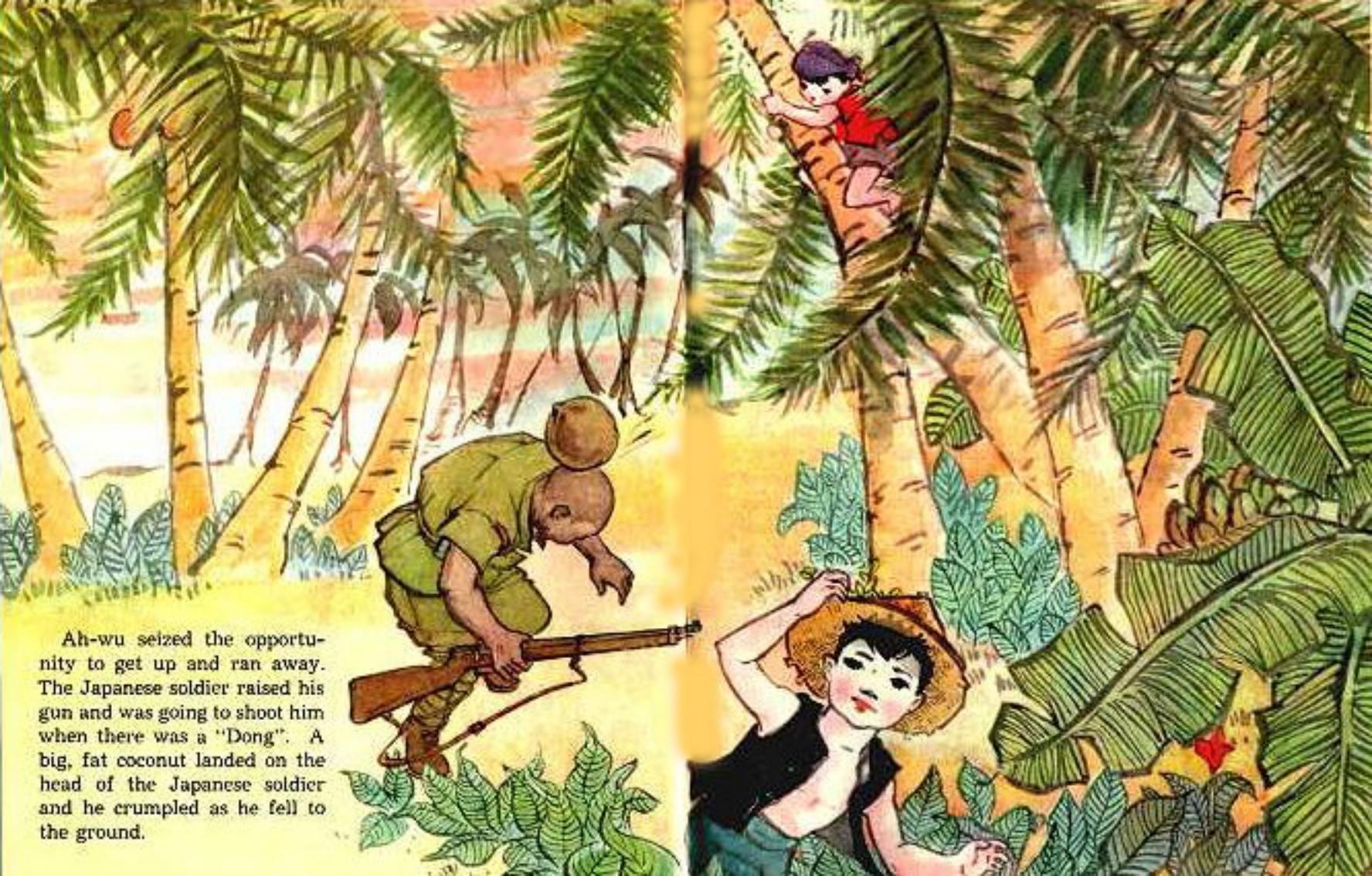
The two Japanese soldiers in the village heard the report of the gun and, thinking it was the guerrillas, threw down the coconuts and fled. Not finding the guard at the truck they were more scared than ever, jumped onto the truck and drove away for all they were worth.



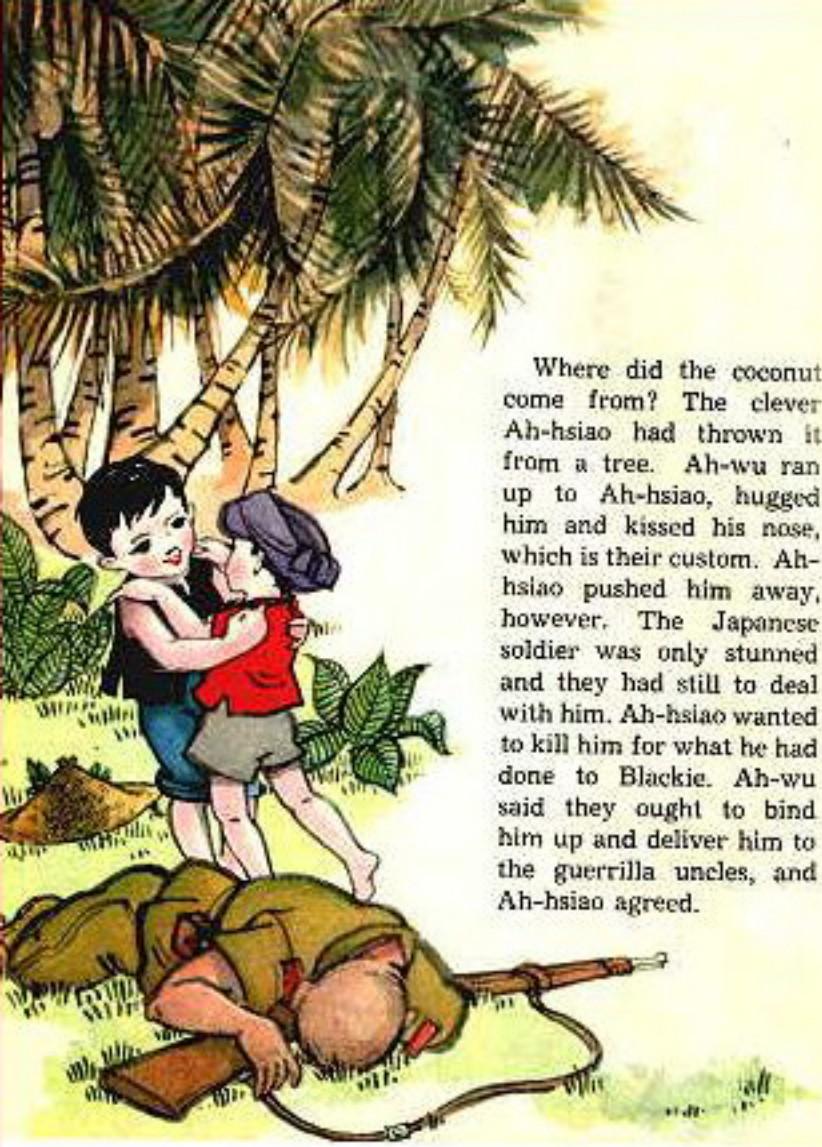
Ah-hsiao heard Blackie growling in the coconut grove and, knowing something was wrong, rushed out of the village and into the grove.



Ah-wu had been chased to the edge of the grove, there was nothing but the great sea before him. He did not see how he was to escape, but clung to the rifle and ran. Then he had the bad luck to trip over a stump, which sent him sprawling on the ground. The Japanese soldier was soon upon him and took away the gun, letting out a horrible chuckle that was even more dreadful than the cry of an owl. In an instant, however, the chuckle turned to a shriek: Blackie had jumped on the Japanese and was tearing at his clothes and biting his hands. The Japanese soldier, whose helmet rolling on the ground, was furious and shot Blackie, killing him.



Ah-wu seized the opportunity to get up and ran away. The Japanese soldier raised his gun and was going to shoot him when there was a "Dong". A big, fat coconut landed on the head of the Japanese soldier and he crumpled as he fell to the ground.

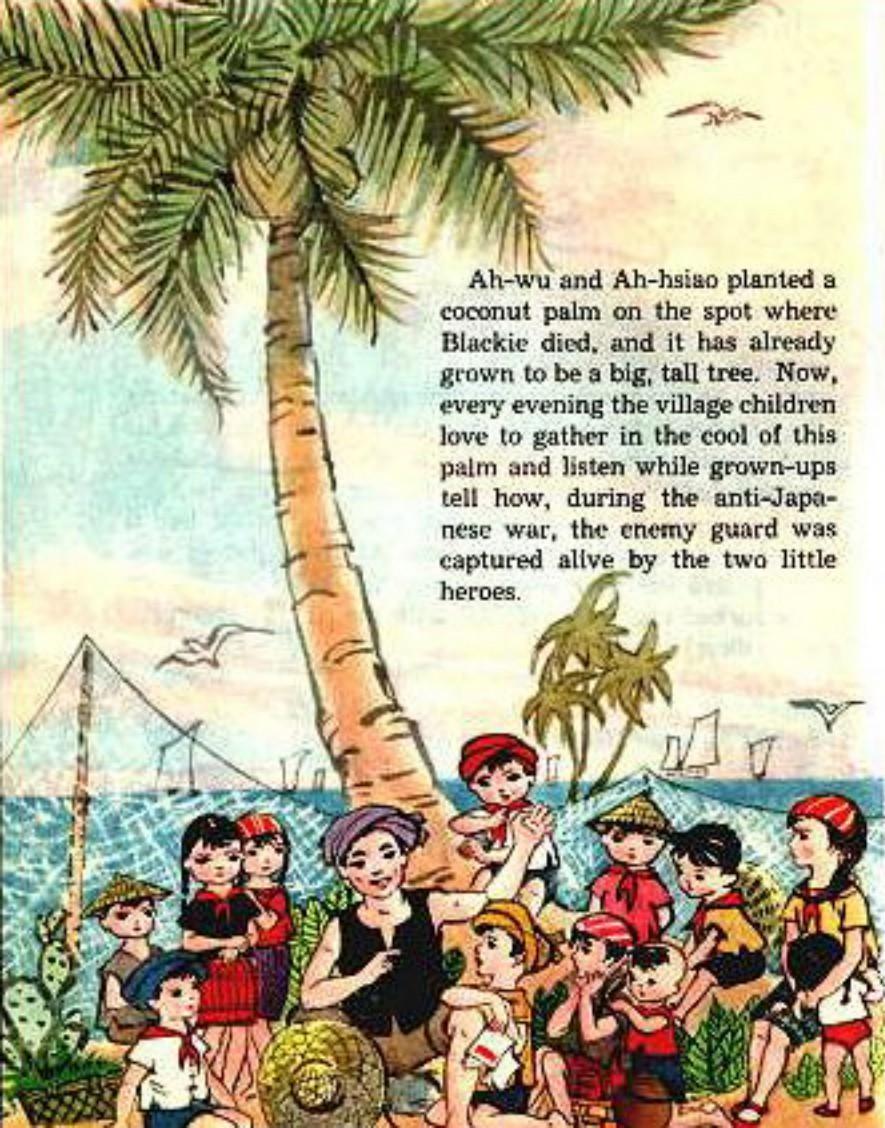


Where did the coconut come from? The clever Ah-hsiao had thrown it from a tree. Ah-wu ran up to Ah-hsiao, hugged him and kissed his nose, which is their custom. Ah-hsiao pushed him away, however. The Japanese soldier was only stunned and they had still to deal with him. Ah-hsiao wanted to kill him for what he had done to Blackie. Ah-wu said they ought to bind him up and deliver him to the guerrilla uncles, and Ah-hsiao agreed.



Ah-wu found a strong vine and bound the Japanese soldier tightly with it, then tied two more around his waist. After Ah-hsiao took the Japanese soldier's tin hat and poured some sea water over him, he soon regained consciousness, and they led him off like a dog on a leash. Ah-wu and Ah-hsiao shoved and pulled till they got him into the hills where they turned him over together with his rifle to the guerrillas,





Ah-wu and Ah-hsiao planted a coconut palm on the spot where Blackie died, and it has already grown to be a big, tall tree. Now, every evening the village children love to gather in the cool of this palm and listen while grown-ups tell how, during the anti-Japanese war, the enemy guard was captured alive by the two little heroes.



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Story by Yeh Tan

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Edited by Shanghai Juvenile Publishing House

FOREIGN LANGUAGES PRESS
PEKING 1963

Printed in the People's Republic of China

Distributed by Guest Shudian (China Publications Centre)

P.O. Box 290, Peking

椰子树下的故事

著 陈文 仲衡编绘

上海少年儿童出版社编组

外文出版社北京分社印制

1963年第一版

印数：(美)3000—149

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